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SUBJECT: KIRKUK PARTIES EXPLORE COALITION OPTIONS, AWAIT
ELECTION LAW

Classified By: PRT Kirkuk Team Leader Gabriel Escobar for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Kirkuk Message.

¶2. (U) Summary: Amid continuing uncertainty over the election law, political parties in Kirkuk province are hard at work sizing up potential coalition partners. While final choices of partners will largely be determined by the election law, the outlines of the three major parties - Kurds, Arabs and Turkomans - have begun to take shape. The Kurdish KDP/PUK bloc is seeking to maintain voting discipline to preserve the integrity of the Kurdish coalition. Turkomans have sought to form a wide array of coalitions in the belief that such an approach will maximize their chances of securing seats. Arab parties, which are essentially split between two large factions, are struggling to achieve some modicum of unity (despite differing agendas and personal enmity between the two groups' leaders) to bolster their chances at the polls.
End Summary.

Kurdish Parties

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¶3. (U) The KDP and PUK teaming up is as close a certainty as can be found in the province. Whether an open list (voters choose individual candidates) or hybrid system (voters choose either party lists or individual candidates) are used for the parliamentary election, the Kurds will try to maintain voting discipline to maximize their results. While the KDP and PUK ran separately in Kurdish regional elections, the Kurdish Islamic Union and Kurdish Toiler,s Party ran combined with PUK and KDP in Diyala and Ninewa in the 2009 provincial elections. Additionally, Kurdish-backed minority parties (Turkoman parties, the Assyrian Democratic Movement and Assyrian People,s Party, for example) have the potential to pick up minority or at-large seats.

¶4. (U) The new variable is the Goran (Change) list, which ran on a strongly anti-incumbent (KDP, PUK) platform in the recent KRG elections. In discussions with General Rostum and Shorsh Hajji, they said they will run a solo campaign, and will entertain coalition offers after the election. Attempts by the KDP and PUK to intimidate Goran supporters in the province have had very limited success; Arab politicians from the sub-districts of Moltoka and Zaab have said they are happy to provide surreptitious financial and other support to Goran as payback for what they regard as past efforts by the PUK and KDP efforts to keep Arab parties fragmented and weak.

Arab Parties

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¶5. (U) The Arab community remains frustrated by their inability to create a unified bloc to compete with the KDP/PUK coalition. The two main local movements have tried for months to create a coalition, but those efforts have failed due to differences between the two main personalities

and their backers. Hussein Ali Saleh al-Jaburi, the Hawija District Council Chair, leads the Arab Unity Bloc, which is supported by tribal affiliates of the Jaburis and rural areas in the south of Kirkuk Province. Ahmed Obeidi leads the Iraqi Kirkuk Front and gathers his strength from more educated and urban Arabs and tribes affiliated with the Obeidi family. Both are trying to attract financial support from national level parties and find a way to unite their groups; those efforts have foundered on the mutual enmity between al-Jaburi and Obeidi and their different constituencies; this is shown in Ahmed Obeidi's continual phone messages to the PRT accusing the Jaburi side of corruption, and comments from Hussein al-Jaburi's bagman Hassan Nsaef that Ahmed Obeidi is &Only good for a lunch8. QHassan Nsaef that Ahmed Obeidi is &Only good for a lunch8. The relative strength of the parties for now appears to be even.

¶6. (U) National Sunni Arab parties, such as the National Movement for Reform and Development and the Iraqi National Dialogue Front, are waiting for the election law. If it prescribes a single district, closed list system, they will be in a good position to add local Arab parties (which would stand little chance of winning seats at the national level under a closed-list system) to their coalition. However, if the law dictates a multi-district approach, whether closed or open, local parties will be courted by national parties. Local parties have stated a preference to avoid strong national partners, whom they perceive would be less influenced by their proposals on Kirkuk.

Turkoman Communities

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¶7. (C) The current strategy of Turkoman parties, per discussion with Provincial Councilmen Hassan Toran and Tahseen Kahea, is to form coalitions with a number of parties to help ensure that they win seats by dint of their coalition partners. (Note: There are persistent rumors in Kirkuk that this strategy was dictated by Ankara in a series of meetings during Ramadan. End note.) Previous results by Turkomans to field a unified list have been disappointing; the Iraqi Turkoman Front (ITF) won a single seat in the December 2005 national elections. Shi'a Turkomans, who see their religious identity as their primary affiliation, will continue to support the Shi'a-dominated Iraqi National Alliance, essentially recapitulating their support for the Shi'a-dominated United Iraqi Alliance in 2005.

¶8. (U) Interviews with Sunni and Shi'a Turkoman politicians admit their strategy depends heavily on the final election law, specifically whether or not there will be compensatory Turkoman seats. Additionally, an open list would hurt the strategy of aligning with other parties, as individual candidates from Turkoman parties would stand out on a list of those with deeper party roots.

Nationalist Parties

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¶9. (C) Nationalist parties that deemphasize their sectarian roots, such as Prime Minister Maliki's State of Law Alliance (SLA) and Ayad Allawi's Iraqi National List, are also active in the province. Currently, SLA is represented by Sheikh Wasfi Al-Assi, a controversial sheikh of the Obeidi tribe. Additionally, SLA is trying to attract Shi'a Turkomans by appealing to their shared Shi'a identity. SLA also appears to have the support of two current COR members, Turkoman Abbas Al-Bayati and Omar al-Jaburi, which would help with name recognition should the ballot be open list. Ayad Allawi's INL has not done particularly well in Kirkuk in the past, but Arab Unity Bloc members Hassan Nsaef and Abdullah Munshed Al-Assi recently commented that they would consider aligning with the INL and would not back Maliki's SLA because of their dislike of SLA's front man in Kirkuk, Wasfi Al-Assi.

¶10. (C) Comment: The modalities of the election law will not affect the Kurdish coalition, but will bear on the contours of the nascent Turkoman and Arab groupings. Kirkuki political types anticipate that coalitions will form quickly once the law is passed, as the actors have already thought through their respective political calculations. End Comment.

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